

1. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle comprising:

at least one sensor mounted on one side of said receptacle, said at least one sensor further comprising:

a light transmitting device for transmitting light into said receptacle, wherein said light is reflected off said coins, when present; and

a light receiving device for receiving the reflected light, when coins are present, and generating a first signal, when coins are present, and a second signal when coins are not present.

2. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 1, wherein said light transmitting device is a photodiode transmitter and said light receiving device is a phototransistor receptor.

3. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 1, wherein said coin supply is arranged in a stack of coins, and wherein said sensor is positioned at a predetermined height to indicate the presence or absence of coin at said predetermined height.

4. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 3, wherein said predetermined height is correlated to a predetermined value of coin.

5. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 3, wherein said predetermined height is at the top of the stack.

6. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 3, wherein said predetermined height is at the bottom of the stack.

7. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 3, wherein said predetermined height is between the bottom and top of the stack.

8. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 1, further comprising an access port constructed in the receptacle aligned with the sensor to allow the transmission and reflection of light through the receptacle.

9. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a sensor for detecting the presence of coins in the receptacle, as described in claim 1, further

comprising a mask mounted on said sensor and having apertures constructed therein aligned with said transmitting and receiving devices, to isolate the receiving device from exposure to transmitted light prior to reflection.

10. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a method of controlling the inventory of coins in said supply comprising the steps of:

transmitting light into the receptacle wherein said light will be reflected from said coins when said coins are present;

sensing the reflected light to determine the presence or absence of coins in the receptacle and generating a signal indicative thereof;

performing the above steps at a predetermined position in the receptacle to indicate a coin inventory event correlated to said predetermined position.

11. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a method of controlling the inventory of coins in said supply, according to claim 10, wherein the steps of transmitting and sensing are performed at multiple predetermined positions.

12. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a supply of coins from a receptacle, a method of controlling the inventory of coins in said supply, according to claim 11, wherein

said multiple predetermined positions are correlated to one or more events selected from the group consisting of:

filled to capacity;

near depletion; and/or

depletion.

13. In a coin dispenser for dispensing a stack of coins from a receptacle, a method of accounting for the said coins as they are dispensed, comprising the steps of:

establishing a predetermined height of said stack of coins correlated to a predetermined number of coins in said stack;

sensing the presence of said coins at said predetermined height and generating a signal in response thereto;

storing the number of coins contained in a full stack of coins in response to said sensor signal; and

counting the number of dispensing operations and subtracting said number of dispensing operations from said stored number of coins in a full stack to determine the number of coins remaining in the stack.